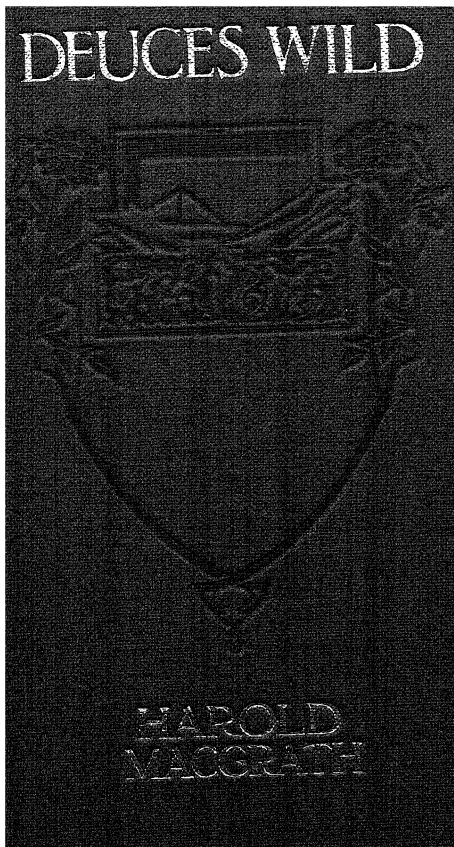


DEUCES WILD



HAROLD
MACGRATH

DEUCES WILD



"Do you want me, Jim?"

DEUCES WILD

By

HAROLD MACGRATH

AUTHOR OF

The Man on the Box, The Place of Honeymoons
Parrot & Co., Etc., Etc.

ILLUSTRATED BY

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I

THE WOMAN ACROSS THE STREET

THIS is a story of two stories, separate yet inseparable, of wheels agog and of wheels awhir, the frolic and the business of life. What a woman's switch is to her glory, this tale is to that; but at night, when the game (which really fools nobody) is over, the false one may be taken from the true and laid aside.

It all began that day when Forbes wondered who she was. He was always wondering who she was, the blonde, the brunette, the Venetian-red, the October-brown, on the street, at the play, in the restaurant. It was a habit. And why

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not? It was his bread-and-butter to send the argosies of his imaginative glance scouring the seas for treasure; and whenever he saw a pretty woman, bows-on he followed in her wake. He was an illustrator; he drew exquisite colored covers for the magazines and full-page drawings for the celebrated love-stories of Mr. Popular Piffle. Indeed, he shared honors with Piffle, and made quite as much money.

His pencil rolled from his board, unobserved; and the red-brown dachel under his chair pounced upon it joyously, gurgling over the delicious pungency of the cedar. As a gourmet adores his pâté of goose-livers and truffles, his cobwebbed bottles of Burgundy, so this merry-eyed, long-bodied, short-legged Bavarian puppy adored his master's pencils, the big, fat, unvarnished ones. He made short work

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of them; they disappeared with the amazing rapidity of those popcorn-balls one tosses on the sacred fish-pond in Rangoon. When Forbes dropped a pencil these days, he reached for a fresh one, having recognized the futility of crawling on his hands and knees over rugs in search of something which had ceased to exist.

Every day now for a week, between three and four in the afternoon, she had gone by, slim, trig, supple. She looked like Somebody; she must be Somebody, for nobody but Somebody could have carried her head the way she did. Where her journey began, where it ended, he had never bothered himself to inquire. It satisfied his needs to expect her at such a time each day and to realize his expectations. Her hair burned like a copper-beech in the sunshine, and her face was as white as milk.

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By George! He stood up, pushed aside his board, and accidentally trod on Herr Fritz's tail. Music. Presently it died away, pianissimo, under the divan. Ordinarily Forbes would have consoled his comrade; but his mind was busy with the girl across the street. If he went out now he could follow her. All he wished to know was where she lived. His ingenuity would find means of meeting her, inoffensively. He knew women tolerably well. From the pretty little milliner's assistant, all the way up to the stately czarina of all the Russias, their vanity cried out for perpetuation on canvas.

Ting-a-ling! Confound the telephone at such a moment!

"Hello, hello! . . . Yes, this is Forbes talking. . . . Oh, that you, Jillson? . . . What? Eight till twelve? . . . Deuces *what?* Oh, deuces wild. Sure, I

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understand. A quiet little game of poker, with the poor artist paying for the cigars and liquors. Deuces wild; I know; you can make the two-spot anything you please. . . . What? Opening your apartment to-night? . . . In the Dryden? Where's that? . . . Why, that's only a block or so away. . . . Oh, I'll be there. Rather play poker than eat. By-by!"

Forbes made a dash for his hat, rushed out of the studio and down the two flights, madly and recklessly. Too late! She was gone. He dashed Jillson and his poker party breathlessly but fluently. Supposing she never walked past again? It would be just his luck.

As a matter of fact, the unknown meant nothing to Forbes aside from the commercial value of her face and hair. He was always hunting for a new face.

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Like Piffle, he could work over his ideas just so many times; after that, fresh invention must be called into play; the retroussé nose must give way to the Grecian, and so on and so forth. It was a busy life, for competition was terrific. He had to be on the lookout for the latest capillary wave, the latest style of collars, hats and trinkets. It was he who brought back the Grecian band; and immediately schoolgirls and shop-girls and show-girls went to and fro with heads that looked for all the world like those little fern-pots tasteful housewives place in the center of their dining-tables.

However, Forbes was a mighty sensible chap. He did not take his work seriously; nor more did his confrère, Mr. Popular Piffle. They had had many a laugh and jest together. They carried about in their heads no nonsense about this thing

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which some wag has called "poor lar" (*L'art pour l'art*); it was a legitimate business, and together they entertained a vast audience with innocuous pleasure. So then, why paint a Madonna of the Chair, why write a *Pere Goriot*, which nobody would buy? As it was, they were making splendid incomes; and who cared if Raphael and Balzac writhed in their tombs?

Forbes was philosophical, too. When he was dead he would be very dead; the Hall of Fame and the Temple of Forgetfulness would be all the same to him. At present he liked travel, good clothes, good food, curios; he liked to give expensive teas in his beautiful studio; he rather liked the innocent admiration of the schoolgirls *et al.*; and he wasn't too proud to accept an occasional thousand from the breakfast-food people and the tinted-soap manufacturers.

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"Give us a new fiz, Forbes," said the editors; "this one is growing stale."

Ah, those editorial degrees of enthusiasm, which began with slaps on the back, paused at luncheons, and finally petered down to the non-committal "umums!" A new face; he must have it; and for two weeks he had combed the town in vain. Popularity had its drawbacks; one had continually to find new props to keep the thing from tumbling about one's ears. Popularity, the new-collar, the new-hat, the new-shoe kind of popularity, which changes completely every six months, which has to be renewed and twisted about and readjusted. And besides, there were those younger chaps always bobbing up, with fresh invention, a touch of the unusual, a new color.

He renewed his bitter arraignment of Jillson and his bally house-warming. For

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now he was sure that the girl with the milk-white skin and the copper-beech hair had been fortune, knocking at his door for a whole week with that persistence which she accords only her favorites, often unmeritedly. And all he had done had been to sit tight in his chair and wonder who she was! Well, she might pass again to-morrow. He would throw formality to the winds, rush across the street and speak to her, plead with her to help a poor devil of an illustrator who was working like sixty to hold his job, who in the best of times (during the sale of some beauty-book) never made more than twenty-five thousand the year.

He climbed back to the studio. He found the dachel munching the soft lead which had such a funny, cool, sweet taste; of the cedar there remained no evidences whatever. The puppy growled an invita-

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tion for a romp, which the artist accepted; and a great time they had, sliding over rugs, banging against the walls, behind tapestries, over sofas and chairs and divans, till at last Forbes, dizzy and breathless, subsided upon a divan. The tireless puppy jumped up beside him and licked his face. He was a very valuable dog. Only last week he had almost ruined a superb digestion while lunching on a five-hundred-dollar drawing which his master had carelessly forgotten to put back into the portfolio.

The elevator-boy opened the door and tossed in the evening newspaper. Thereupon Forbes filled his calabash, sought the comfy-chair under the reading lamp and idly went over the day's events. The puppy, sniffing the tobacco smoke which he thoroughly detested, retreated under the divan where he had his lion's den of

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bones, palate-knives, old tubes, brushes and what-nots. From time to time Forbes could hear him rattling round something.

Births, deaths and divorces; murder, robbery and graft; strikes, wars and plagues; the subject-matter never varied, only the names and places could be called news. He read with lazy interest a warmed-over yarn about the clever gentleman-thief who had baffled the metropolitan police for nearly a year. A well-known amateur detective was giving the reporter an exposition of his views. Here was an artist. (Forbes crackled the newspaper peevishly: was there anything left to which this term had not been applied? Anybody who did his work well was an artist. Rot!)

The thief, declared the amateur, was not a professional. He was a man of infinite patience, of infernal cleverness,

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never took money, had made three daring raids and ceased further to apply his talents. To date the man had taken over a hundred thousand dollars' worth of jewels. His career had begun and ended within three months.

So far, not a single part of the loot had been offered to the known "fences," here or abroad. This was the phase which puzzled and baffled the police. Now he (Mr. Amateur) held to the theory that the thief was a man who moved in the exclusive circles (two more words Forbes hated) from which the jewels had been purloined. Even the police admitted that he possessed an intimate and accurate knowledge of the habits of his victims. But the genius of the man was made manifest in his ability to wait. Was there a woman? Was there unlucky speculation? Horses and cards? Or was it what he

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(Mr. Amateur) had stated in a previous article: simply a brilliant hoax, a practical joke, a careless wager by an idle rich young man, who, when the time arrived, would quietly restore the jewels, give a dinner and then search about for some new abnormality? At any rate, in his opinion the Bertillon system would never get hold of the man to measure him for future identification.

In this Mr. Amateur was perfectly correct. They never got hold of the man. Almost, however; only an arm's length away; a clutch, a distance misjudged, and off he went, into space, like an exploded atom.

II

WHY HURRY?

FORBES lived the way of most bachelor painters: a kitchen, two bedrooms and the studio, which was nothing less than a huge living-room. Upon a time it had been occupied by a fashionable photographer; so Forbes worked in the best of lights. In the hands of his Japanese valet he dressed well, dined well, adding to-night a pint of Chambertin; went out into the studio again, smoked and dreamed of the wonderful things which he very well knew he would never attempt, let alone accomplish.

He was much in demand socially. He was witty, clever, good-looking, with real

WHY HURRY?

talent back of his popularity. The young married people and their juniors never omitted him from their frolics; he had a perfect right to play with them. His family history was very good, so good in fact, that his capability of taking care of himself, of standing on his own legs, made him rather interesting, you know. It was ripping fun for a chap to make his own pocket-money and not have to run to papa when some balky filly came in fifth in a field of five. The amazing thing to me was neither the one nor the other of these side-lights, family history and earning capacity: it lay in the fact that Forbes always returned optimistically to his work, unscotched by the prevailing cynicism of the day.

He danced well, never went beyond moderation in tippling, paid his losses and took his gains at cards with an equanimity

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of heart and countenance truly oriental. The old men liked him for his manliness and independence; and the dowagers eagerly courted his favors, for like all artists he was an exceedingly well-informed gossip. He had the faculty of leading them to the very lip of the precipice and then swerving them back before they had time to look over. The most amiable kind of a gossip, always promising to disclose something and never doing it; and having a good deal of quiet fun out of it without harming any one.

At a quarter to eight he strapped on Herr Fritz's muzzle, and the puppy crept dejectedly into his basket, snuffling. He bore down upon the insulting thing with his strong broad forefeet, without avail. It was a hard world.

"Nothing doing, old top. There won't be any rose-madder in your tummy to-

WHY HURRY?

night. See you later. And think well of your chicken; it may be dog-biscuit tomorrow. You never can tell what these poker games are going to do to a fellow. By-by!"

Every man who does one thing well has a craving to do another man's work badly. Forbes was always hungering for detective work. He longed to pick up the tangled skein, unravel it, rescue the heroine, march the villain to jail and all that. Heaven is witness of the plots for detective stories he has offered me! He has, I believe, the best library of detective fiction in town. Well, his longings went unsatisfied. The only thing like detective work he ever did successfully was to recover the new paint-tubes before the dachel poisoned himself.

He walked up-town, wondering who the mysterious burglar could be. He searched

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carefully among his large acquaintance, principally among the men he disliked; but even then there was nothing tangible. Lots of duffers gambled and didn't pay their debts and never went to jail for it. If only he had a clue of some sort to start with! He knew that he had the ability; and it was a shame he could find no outlet. I'll give him credit for possessing the chiefest attribute of all great detectives—hope.

“Hang about the police-courts,” I once advised him; “study the lesser criminal. Make a friend of the policeman on your beat and go the rounds with him some night. A thousand petty crimes are happening every day, right next door to you. But I know. You're waiting for some one to stage a Gaboriau for you. Rich banker—daughter in love with the cashier—safe robbed—cashier goes to jail—

WHY HURRY?

shoe-string is found—behold the criminal in the banker's private secretary!"

He laughed and told me to go to Tophet. But he knew that I had his hide on the wall. He hated the sordid, and I do not blame him; for petty crimes and police-courts are sordid; but in this he lost the true direction of his gifts. Out of poverty and sordidness the great inspirations rise, never out of pleasure and pastime, things to which he devoted his labor and leisure.

He continued on, whistling an air from one of the popular operas. His thoughts, ever volatile, shifted from plots of criminals to the purblindness of the general run of art-editors, and their more or less slovenly minions, the three-color process printers; to the pretty girl he had met at Cannes last winter; to the campaign tonight at poker. For once he was going

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to play 'em close; he would keep out every pot that dealt him no two-spots and when he got a real hand, he would play it *hard*. With deuces wild even an open player like himself had a chance once in a while. He turned a corner, still whistling. The girl with the copper-bee hair: supposing she never went by again. Could he possibly do her from memory?

Forward with swinging stride, twirling his cane and sometimes striking the ferrule against the flagging, pleased with the spangle of answering sparks; on toward the big drama. For he was only an implement of fate, chosen haphazard to accomplish a destiny not his own.

The Dryden was a new apartment house, built especially for persons who had plenty of money and too small a family for the up-keep of a large house. They were given all the comforts of home

WHY HURRY?

valets, maids, cooks, waiters and bell boys, more like a private hotel. There were ten apartments, five on each side of the ornate marble entrance. Forbes ran eagerly up the steps; the door-boy swung open the door.

"Mr. Jillson's apartment, please."

"Third floor, left, sir."

"Ah!"

Forbes made for the stairs. The elevator (called lift here) was up, and he was too impatient to wait. Besides, he wanted to surprise the boys, melodramatically. He scarcely paused at the first landing. He would rather play poke than eat. And in his exuberance he failed to hear the warning call from the door-boy, who had come on that day and was not yet accurately versed in the topography and occupancy of the apartments. Forbes continued his rapid ascent

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two steps at a time. He wanted to be at the door at precisely eight, like that old chap what's-his-name in *Round the World in Eighty Days*.

He tiptoed into the private hall, the outer door being unlocked. There was a light over the transom. He could see them in his mind's eye: Jillson, Wheedon, Jones, Carlyle, Miller and Crawford, peering into their hands, their faces like Buddha gods. He listened. Not a sound. In the middle of a play, no doubt. Stealthily he put his hand on the knob, turned and pushed it, with the cry "Police!" on his lips. The word died there, dryly. He saw no poker game in action. Instead, a man in evening dress, full masked, knelt with his back to an open safe. As for the artist, he gazed panic-stricken into the round black sinister hole of a Colt's automatic.

III

A WILD GOOSE CHASE

AT the exact moment when J. Mortimer Forbes was being apprised of the fact that this was an amazing world and that previously he had been meandering only among the foot-notes of the Great Story, an elderly gentleman and a very handsome young woman sat in a subway train which roared emptily on its way down-town. The elderly man was gray-haired and he wore a closely cropped gray mustache, a style much affected by Americans living in New York. He possessed all the hall-marks of a prosperous clubman. The spats spoke eloquently of the reading-room and of moderately

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heated political arguments. Attached to his eye-glasses was a heavy cord, up and down which he continually ran his fingers; to those who knew him, a sign of perturbation. Now and then he poked the ferrule of his Malacca walking-stick into the matting on the floor, or tapped it, causing little puffs of dust to rise, like musketry down in a valley.

The young woman stared with unseeing eyes at the opposite window; fine eyes they were, blue as Russian lapis-lazuli, similarly streaked with threads of gold, and heavily fringed. The girl was really and truly beautiful; even the few belated ones realized this, and forgot their nightly study of the alluring advertisements. She was a tonic to the weary eyes; a tonic like the unexpected vision of green fields, crystal waters and the blue haze on the hills far away. Her hair

A WILD GOOSE CHASE

was not the least of her attractions; it smoldered mysteriously, as if fire lay hidden in the deeps of it.

"Wonder what on earth he wants," said the man, and nibbled the ivory head of his stick.

The girl did not reply. Perhaps she had not heard him.

"I can't think of anything he should want, unless it's about some old investment that's turned out bad. But then, he'd write. I give it up."

Across the aisle the little shop-girl, who was going home to Brooklyn (imagine having a home there!) dropped her gaze from the brilliant lithograph of Chaffem's toasted wheaties (one of Forbes's earlier pieces) to the furs of the beautiful young lady. She sat up with a start. Sables! she thought. Not Manchurian, but the genuine North-Russian. She was a clerk

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in an up-town furrier's and knew her business. Off-hand she measured the length and breadth of the cloak; not a penny under seven thousand. And riding in the subway when she ought to be in a limousine, with chauffeur and footman! Swells were funny folk; they were always doing things like every-day people. And the muff wouldn't have left more than the price of a theater ticket out of a thousand. And what's more, she knew how to wear them. She wasn't any of those actresses. Catch *them* riding in the subway!

"Some legal muddle," the elderly man complained. "Your mother's brother wasn't in his right mind."

"There's nothing for you to complain of," spoke the girl at last, without, however, turning her head.

"Can't say there is. Three millions,



“Wonder what on earth he wants”

A WILD GOOSE CHASE

mostly out at seven per cent." He coughed slightly. "He was novel-reading mad; no sane man would have drawn up such a will. It's as much as our lives are worth to keep all that junk about. Wouldn't give the stuff to the Metropolitan because they wouldn't take any stock in his claim that that ruby belonged to the Nana-Sahib. Anyhow, history says that Hindu beggar died in the jungles and that he took the jewel along with him."

"Junk! How can you call all those beautiful things junk? I love every one of them. He was right. Only one person in a thousand who visit the museums would understand or appreciate them."

"That may be, but no light-fingered gentry would be prowling about."

The beautiful young lady shrugged. She had gone over the ground so often that the subject wearied her. She loved

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her father, but she could not understand his utter lack of appreciation for the wonderful curios her uncle had bequeathed her, with the single stipulation that she should *use* them. The shrug discovered for a second the milky depth of the fur. And the little shop-girl shivered with delight. But she vaguely wondered why the beautiful young lady's face wasn't a happy one. Any woman in such sables (even if she had just lost her husband) ought to be supremely happy. The rule which measures happiness is available alike to the field-mouse and the elephant: it's all in the angle of vision.

That the girl in the sables was unhappy was quite apparent. It was not a petulant sadness, as in having had her will crossed, as in having stumbled over some temporary disappointment. Her face reflected a deep sorrow from within; of a kind for which money at her age is no balm. Great

A WILD GOOSE CHASE

peace and great sorrow have the same brushes in limning in a face; the result is generally a beatific placidity. If you looked at the girl's eyes they told you nothing, nor the droop of her mouth, nor the pallor of her fine skin; and yet the ensemble produced a haunting sadness. It made you remember the face for days.

At Madison Square the two got out, and the little shop-girl continued her journey, to dream of dukes and duchesses and wolds and gabled manses.

The girl in the sables and her father hurried over to the monolith of marble and were shot up to the eighteenth floor. The suite of law-offices to which they had been so strangely summoned were in total darkness. The bell rang and rang and echoed eerily through the empty rooms so mightily busy during the secular days of the year.

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"Looks like a hoax."

"Perhaps we've come too late."

"Too late? It isn't nine yet," growled the father, recollecting the quiet rubber at the club he had been forced to postpone. "He phoned that it would be very, even exceedingly, important for us to be here before nine. Shall we wait?"

"Certainly." The girl began pulling down the finger-tips of her gloves and twisting them.

"I'm a doddering old fool!" exclaimed her father suddenly.

"Father!"

"I never telephoned his house to make sure. Why should we come down here to his offices?"

They hastened back to the elevator and went down. The elderly man stepped into the pay-station booth. Presently he emerged, wrathful of countenance.

A WILD GOOSE CHASE

"Never called up at all. Doesn't know what I'm talking about. A whole evening spoiled!"

"But what can it mean? What can it mean?"

Down into the dank subway again; and twenty minutes later, at nine-fifteen, the two arrived at the apartment on the third floor of the Dryden. The girl opened the door impetuously, fearing she knew not what. In the plain ordinary safe in the living-room reposed the Nana-Sahib's ruby and fifteen thousand dollars.

A few blocks over the way, in a dark and cavernous studio, a lonesome dachel was baying at the intermittent ting-a-linging of the telephone.

Across the city there stood a series of apartments which had never been fashionable, though many of the inhabitants put up brave pretense for such recogni-

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tion; wherein the real estate agents reaped sundry profits. By some, the indifferent principally, they were called flats. In one of these, comfortably appointed, with a few really good rugs on the floors and furniture which was neither acrobatic nor offensive, there lived a woman. She was young and pretty in a faded way. She was preparing for bed; and as she let down her hair, the many gray threads caused a pucker to come between her eyes. Her expression was placid; but it was the placidity of the crushed and the beaten, not of the resigned.

From a brick house in another quarter of the town, a quarter which had fallen under the edict of mobile fashion along about war-time, a man stepped forth noiselessly and disappeared into the night, became a shadow among shadows.

IV

A PAGE FROM SCHEHEREZADE

IN the meantime Forbes was invited by the burglar to come in and sit down. He entered the room, thoroughly hypnotized.

“Sit down in that chair there,” went on the man in the mask, indicating a fine Sheraton. Strange, that Forbes should give any particular attention to the make of a chair. “There’s a good chap,” came hoarsely. “I should hate to give you a crack on the head. If you keep perfectly quiet and do as you’re told, I shan’t be forced to hurt you. Now listen carefully. Take out your handkerchief. Top pocket, overcoat, *if* you please! Now tie it over your mouth. That’s the way.”

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Forbes was by no means a coward; but the unexpectedness of the encounter stunned him. He forgot that he had ever wanted to be an amateur detective. The burglar rose to his feet with astonishing agility. Forbes watched him, under a malevolent enchantment. He saw the man whip down from the wall a rare old priest's stole.

"Put your hands behind the chair and hold them there. The automatic's the quickest thing in the world."

A moment later Forbes felt the rough edges of the stole sink into his wrists. The ends went in and out of the spindles and the knot came under his elbows. Next, the handkerchief was given a precautionary twist. The Bokhara embroidery on the low-boy was also forced into service. This secured his ankles to the legs of the chair.

FROM SCHEHEREZADE

“Don’t know what *you* came in for, for you opened the door without knocking. Never mind.” The burglar slipped the pistol into a pocket. “Now, don’t worry. Perhaps sometime before midnight the people who live here will come to your assistance.”

Then the rogue knelt before the safe again and took out an exquisite Florentine jewel-box. He did not bother to try the lock. He was evidently pressed for time. He simply wrapped it up in a newspaper, tied it securely with a string he found in a work-basket, picked up his tools, his hat and coat, and paused for a moment on the threshold. Forbes could see the sparkle of his eyes through the holes in the mask. He also saw that there was a slight gash across the knuckles of the man’s left hand.

“Sorry to leave you in this fix.” The man bowed briefly and went out.

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Forbes heard the snap of the switch-button. Instantly he was in total darkness. Then he heard the click of the bolt. He was now locked in. Presently his brain resumed its functions; he began to think in little sparks of thought: as if permitting electric fluid to enter a wire by degrees, jerkily. For the last ten minutes he had been as completely hypnotized as if he had been staring for hours into a Swami's crystal. His first coherent thought was one of those best left unspoken, unwritten. He had entered, picturing in his mind a familiar scene, six familiar faces; and *this* instead! It would have hypnotized any one.

A blockhead! A sheep! To have allowed himself to be trussed up this way, without a single struggle, without a word! A fine detective! He strained at his hands, and then at his ankles, but desisted

FROM SCHEHEREZADE

when the chair threatened to topple over. On the floor he would be absolutely helpless. So he sat there in the dark, mouthing at his handkerchief and trying to get his teeth into it.

The man had a freshly skinned knuckle. He would remember that when the police came. He would never be able to recall the voice, so effectually muffled behind the curtain of the mask. In evening dress, too, and wore it to the manner born: here in little old New York! And then it came upon him with the dazzlement of sunrise. The mysterious burglar of the newspapers! He recollected some of the drawings he had made of heroes in durance vile, ironically recollected them, along with the balderdash they were supposed to illustrate. Why hadn't he flung himself over backward while the fellow was tying his hands together? He was

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no infant; he was athletic, strong as the average man of his height and weight. He might have got the upper hand. . . . Oh, rot! It was all very well to think of the things to do when it was too late. Any battle could be won if you fought it backward.

He began to swear again; guttural sounds which started in his throat and ended, bassoon-like, in his nose. Dash the door-boy, to have given him the wrong floor! Somewhere up above or down below they were waiting for him; the cards were purring, the chips clicking musically against one another. Deuces wild. If you held a king and queen of any suit, together with three deuces, you could call it four queens, or four kings, or a royal, just as you pleased. Open on anything; no weary waiting for jacks or better; something doing every minute. (It

FROM SCHEHEREZADE

never occurred to him that the burglar had already saved him about fifty dollars!)

And when the occupants of this room returned they would doubtless, and with reason, hand him over to the police, and the deuce (wild, indeed!) would be to pay. Moreover, he would never hear the last of it. He, who had never left himself open to ridicule, would be the laughing-stock of the town.

Numbness crept into his arms and legs. He could not shift the handkerchief a solitary inch, not a fraction of an inch. Occasionally he heard sounds; the lift-door closing, some one going up or down the stairs, the rattle of a far-off elevated train, the honk of an auto-horn in the street below. Beautiful situation for J. Mortimer Forbes, famous illustrator! Hours and hours and hours passed; at

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least so it seemed to him. Of course it was just his luck to strike a place where the people kept ungodly hours. He would not be able to work for days. The gold thread of the stole cut like a razor's edge. The beggar might have left the lights on, so that he could have found some amusement in staring at the furnishings and speculating as to the taste of the absent ones. But to sit in pure darkness (for the blinds were down), his nerves all awrack from listening and waiting, his lungs aching for the want of a deep breath—it was all mighty unpleasant.

Thank heaven! Some one was turning a key in the lock. They had come at last. He suddenly found himself blinking into the light. Over the threshold came an elderly man and a young woman.

“Good heavens!” cried the young woman.

FROM SCHEHEREZADE

Forbes said nothing, but his eyes threatened to fall out of his head. For the young woman was no less a person than she of the copper-beech hair; and her face was as sad and beautiful as Bellini's Madonna in that rickety old church by the side of that smelly old canal in Venice!

V

THE FLORENTINE BOX

WHEN a young man meets face to face the girl of his dreams, artistic or amatory, the nature of things requires that he shall be dressed to the queen's taste. What queen is irrelevant, as all the romancers I wot of disagree. Certainly it may not be the Lady of Cyprus, since she was non-sartorial; Margot, perhaps, or Mary; some half-goddess, posing mistily between history and tradition; *not* Elizabeth, to whom I deny any taste whatever. To proceed. He shall wear in his buttonhole a gardenia by preference, the popular vote having been given to that delicate flower in

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the remote but unforgettable epoch of *Moths*. There shall be no flaw in the outward make-up which appoints "men . . . gay deceivers ever." A doffed hat, all but brushing the varnished boots, a gloved hand covering the heart. . . .

After all, I have no right to make light of Forbes' predicament. It is not very agreeable to have Her burst in upon you when you look ready for the oven, like a Thanksgiving turkey. And Forbes, for all his amatory flights, was (and is) a clean, kindly, honorable young man, capable of rising to heights, as shall be seen.

"What the devil are you doing here?" thundered the elderly man.

Forbes mumbled behind his handkerchief.

"What's been going on here?"

The girl, however, had some sense. She

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quickly unknotted the handkerchief. Forbes gasped hungrily, like a fish out of water, and worked his tongue around his cheeks. Something issued from his numb lips that sounded like "Thank you."

"What has happened?" demanded the girl.

"A gentleman in a black mask"

"Janet, the safe! We have been robbed! I told you it would happen!"

The girl and her father rushed over, getting in each other's way.

"Never saw the ruby nor the money!"

"But he has taken my jewel-box!" The girl stood up, leaning against the wall, her eyes shut. Forbes expected her to crumple up and sink to the floor, like one of Piffle's heroines. "My jewel-box!"—in a low murmur.

"I beg pardon," said Forbes; "but I'd be extremely grateful if you'd take

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off these things. What time is it?"—irrelevantly.

"What time is it!" bawled the girl's father. "Well, you're a cool hand! Quarter after nine."

"Quarter after nine? Haven't I been here any longer than that?"

"What I want to know is, what are you doing here at all?" The elderly man picked up the extension telephone.

"Father, what are you going to do?"

"Do?"—irately. "Why, send down to the club for the caterer. What do you suppose?"

"If you call the police you'll only make me very unhappy. I forbid you."

"Good lord!" Her father set down the telephone roughly. "Have your own way; but some fine night we'll have our throats cut."

Forbes stared at the girl, much aston-

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ished. No hysterical wringing of hands, no rushing about aimlessly; only a quiet acceptance of the inevitable. She did not want the police; investigation would only make her unhappy. What *had* that box contained? Then his astonishment gave place to speculative admiration. He saw her profile on the cover of *The World-Wide*, her arms filled with golden-rod. Corking cover. He could use the head for a year at least. No hesitant art-editors when they saw this. What a find!

"Will you kindly tell us how you came here?" The girl turned to Forbes inquiringly.

"I am Mortimer Forbes," he said simply.

Her eyebrows remained elevated.

"The illustrator."

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No change in her expression.

She had never heard of him! And she wasn't a foreigner, either. Forbes was rather abashed.

"I came in here believing it to be the apartment of Mr. Jillson, my friend."

"Jillson? Oh, now we are getting somewhere. Know him. Same club. Lives over us. Moved in last week. Soon find out whether you're telling the truth or not. I'll go up and get him. If he knows Mr.—ah—"

"Forbes"—dully. Not that Forbes was a vain man, but he believed it a matter of course that everybody had heard of him or seen his work.

"—Forbes. If what you say is true . . ." The excited parent did not complete the sentence but bolted from the apartment.

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The girl walked over to the safe again and rummaged about. She was as pale as a lily. "You saw a man in a mask?"

"Yes."

"You saw him take a box?"

"Yes. A Florentine affair." The stole was biting painfully. "He made no attempt to open it."

She nodded. Then she held out for his inspection a large roll of crisp green and yellow bills.

"He couldn't have seen it," replied Forbes, understanding her gesture.

"Do you know how much is there?"

"I haven't had the pleasure of counting it!"—curtly. "I came in here expecting to see a poker game; instead, a pistol was held at my head and I was politely requested to be seated. Oh, he was very polite!"—bitterly.

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The girl didn't apologize. "Fifteen thousand dollars." She said it musingly.

"Fif. . . . What, in these days of hecks, do you carry that much loose in our safe for?"

"I drew it from the bank this morning. To-morrow an agent from an emerald mine in Delhi is coming with a necklace ordered. It was to be cash. It is made up of thirty stones."

Tame grew the tales of Scheherezade, daughter of the grand vizier. Thirty emeralds at five hundred each! *Would* he let him sketch her head?

She sat down, her arm flung across the back of a chair and her face half hidden in the furry sleeve. The money slipped from her fingers and fluttered like autumn leaves at her feet. Was she crying? Forbes could not tell.

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"I am sorry," he said. "But would you mind untying these treasures? On the word of a gentleman, I shan't make any effort to go away. It was all a mistake on my part. Yet I am glad I blundered in. I may be able to help you to recover the box. My hands are so numb, and I do not believe I have any feet."

"Oh!" She got up and came over to him and deftly removed the stole and the Bokhara embroidery. Gratefully Forbes stretched himself.

"Women ought never to leave their jewels in boxes. A box like yours is an invitation to any burglar who sees it."

"It contained nothing but letters. I keep all my jewels save one at the bank."

"Letters?" Forbes laughed softly. "Well, the rogue will be nicely sold. That's something."

The girl returned to her chair, and



Was she crying?

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there she sat, staring stonily into the black cavity of the safe.

Forbes tried to stand up, but swayed rockily and plumped back into the Sheraton, which, being genuinely antique, protested ominously. Presently he tried it again, walking doubtfully round the chair. Sure of his balance at last, he picked up the bills, made a compact roll of them, and laid them in the girl's lap.

"Thank you," she said, just as if he had offered her a cup of tea.

VI

CRAWFORD'S LUCK

“**W**ERE the letters valuable?” he asked, without realizing the impertinence of the question.

Her silence was rebuking enough.

“I beg your pardon!”

Forbes returned to the Sheraton. He was not so strong on his legs as he had believed. Having nothing else to do, he took inventory of his surroundings, and what he saw subdued him.

He was an amateur collector; but, shades of the old chap in *Le Peau de Chagrin*! A Salvator Rosa, a pencil-drawing by Da Vinci (a model of a bastion), a Corot with the original sketches sur-

CRAWFORD'S LUCK

rounding it, a marvelous camp-scene in the broad humor of Brouwer, a Teniers, a framed letter by Peter Paul Rubens with a fat Silenus in the corner; dozens of small canvases beyond price. And there was a vase of imperial ox-blood, a piece of Hirado worth a king's ransom, a Chinese wedding scene done in blue kingfisher-feather. Forbes glanced bewilderedly at the Bokhara embroidery which had been so ruthlessly wound about his ankles; fit to have graced the walls of the Dewan Khass, in Delhi, as a background for Shah Jehan's Peacock Throne. And there were Japanese silk tapestries, of the softest, most beautiful colors the world has yet known; a square of Gobelin hanging as a portière between the living-room and the library; old armor, steel inlaid with gold, of the period of Charles V; Ispahans, Kirmans, Bokharas, Saruks, real, old shim-

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mering rugs; a cabinet filled with apple-green jade snuff-bottles and flowers!

Small wonder she had never heard of J. Mortimer Forbes, of Piffle and Company! And from among all these treasures the beggar had taken only a leather box which he could have duplicated in the Via Guicciardini, in Florence, for less than fifty francs. Broken into the safe for it; overlooked a fortune in untraceable bank-notes, a ruby. Letters! Well, there were letters and letters, and there were certain kinds of inestimable value to the blackmailer; but this was not the place to come for them. Poor benighted beggar, when he might have taken away that Frans Hals, worth its *size* covered with Ural gold!

The girl was practically oblivious of his presence. He studied her face again. Why, there ought to be fire in it instead

CRAWFORD'S LUCK

of that look of ashes. In a fury she would have been as magnificent as Judith. His heart sank a little; no romance here for J. Mortimer, however well he might come to know her.

"I ought to have risked a chance with the man," he said; "but I was perfectly dumfounded at the sight of him."

She turned her eyes upon him, surprisedly, as if he had suddenly burst into the room through a window or a hole in the wall. And she had never heard of J. Mortimer Forbes! Well, that was quite possible. A young and beautiful woman who went in for jade snuff-bottles and pieces of Shah Abbas rugs was not to be expected to bother about magazine covers, and heaven knew there were enough of them! Breakfast-foods and soaps and hair-tonics! He had thrown away a brilliant career because it was easier to earn

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money than to strive for good work. He and Piffle were in the same boat; too fond of Avocado pears and ten-year-old champagnes. Now it was too late.

"Is there anything I can do?"

"No."

"If you don't mind, I should like a drink of water."

"Oh!" She got up quickly. The bills scattered about the floor again. Forbes was becoming more and more positive that he was in the middle of some wonderful nightmare. He expected nothing less than a goblet of Chinese bendable glass; but as she returned with an ordinary tumbler, he got himself in hand once more.

For the second time he retrieved the bills. This time she tossed them into the safe. Fifteen thousand dollars; as he

CRAWFORD'S LUCK

would have tossed a tailor's bill into the waste-basket, and often did!

Then in came the young woman's father, Jillson and a very pale door-boy.

"Mort, you old vagabond, what the deuce have you been up to now?" cried Jillson. "Good evening, Miss Mearson."

So her name was Mearson. Where had he heard that name before?

"Why, that imbecile of a boy there told me the third floor, left, and here it is."

"I called up, sir, but you did not hear me, you were in such a hurry. I came on new to-day."

Jillson smiled. "You may go. I shan't report you this time." The boy vanished gladly enough. "Now, supposing we send for the police?"

"No," said Miss Mearson determinedly. "It might attract other thieves. I do

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not want the police or the newspapers to know anything about the affair. The box will be returned when he finds nothing but letters in it."

Mr. Mearson jerked his shoulders; Jillson scratched his chin; Forbes sighed.

"Well, then, Forbes—but I beg pardon. Forbes, Miss Mearson and her father. Forbes, Miss Mearson, is an old friend of mine, an artist."

"Sorry you've had all this inconvenience," said Mearson decently. "It was a clever scoundrel. Seemed to know about our affairs. Lured us down-town; false telephone call."

"No harm done," replied Jillson, locking his arm in Forbes'. "Good night. Hope the box is returned when the thief finds there's nothing valuable in it."

The girl smiled in a detached way.

CRAWFORD'S LUCK

"Now, Jill, old man," said Forbes on the way up to Jillson's, "a word about this, and I'll never forgive you. Did Mearson speak before the boys?"

"No. You're safe enough. Mum's the word if it will ease you. Mighty good joke on you, though. We've been waiting for you for an hour. Rang up your studio, your club and your favorite bar. Crawford's having his usual run of luck. Four-card draws and all that, and he's four hundred ahead of the game at this minute."

"He's always the devil's luck. But, lucky at cards, unlucky at love."

"Oh, punk! There's Wheedon; happiest married man in town, and he wins about five thousand a year. Only, Crawford's luck is uncanny."

"Good old Crawffy! Who are the Mearsons? I've heard the name before."

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"He's a thorough-going clubman."

"Hang it, I mean the girl. And all those museum pieces. . . ."

"Oh, she's the niece of that ratty old codger Mearson, the curio-collector. Left his millions to the girl and the best of his collection. As I understand it, she must use the collection as furniture. He rowed with all the museums over a big ruby. But don't set your eye there, my boy. We call her the Frozen Lady." Jillson flung open the door. "Here he is, boys; got into the wrong apartment. Koto, bring the brandy. There's your chair; and play 'em close!"

His friends greeted Forbes boisterously. They had made sundry wagers as to what had detained him, and the consensus of opinion was that he had seen a pretty face and followed it; which was indignantly denied.

CRAWFORD'S LUCK

Forbes sat down next to Crawford, who slapped him on the shoulder. He liked Crawford the best of all his friends; Crawford, the kindly, the loyal, the silent, the scholar who wrote brochures on ancient hieroglyphics, who was rich but who lived like a sensible lawyer's clerk; who was always agreeable and charming, whose eyes had that calm steady unchanging gray of the sea where it nears the horizon. He fought shy of women; but he was not one of those mentally deficient apes who call themselves woman-haters. He merely avoided them; why, no one knew. Many were after him for his money and many sought him for his own sake, but he was not to be caught.

Forbes was eager to get him alone and to recount his extraordinary adventure, for Crawford was an excellent judge of adventures, being a great hunter and a

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famed archeologist, his past bristling with the most amazing exploits which the newspaper writers had not yet stumbled upon. He lived alone in a barn of a house in a most unfashionable district, surrounded by mummies and waited upon by a valet who always looked to Forbes as if he had just stepped out of one of the cartonnages.

Strange, that the baw-baw man is generally as empty as a sucked egg, while the mum chap over there in the corner is Sindbad the Sailor in an ill-fitting contraption from Poole's. Though, Crawford's tailor was impeccable. More likely Tom and Company, of Yokohama. For Crawford had a mysterious way of turning up in strange places, of sailing without advising his friends, of returning as quietly as though he had been spending the week-end over in Connecticut.

CRAWFORD'S LUCK

He was very fond of the artist, knowing the real man below the egg-froth and crumbly pie-crust of popularity.

"Wake up, old boy, wake up!" rallied Crawford, as he raked in the pot. "This is deuces wild to-night, and an ace-full isn't worth the cardboard it's printed on. Get into the game; the night is young." The chips rattled into Crawford's compartment.

Early the winter before Forbes had broken his leg while riding to hounds over in Westchester. The surgeon had given him an anesthetic during the setting of the bone. The drug had not befuddled his brain, but it had taken away all sense of feeling from his body. Just now he experienced the same bewildering numbness. Jillson swept up the cards, riffled them prettily and dealt. Deuces wild! Forbes picked up his cards mechanically.

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. . . Crawford! . . . The cut
knuckles! . . . Emeralds and pearls
and rubies and Florentine boxes! . . .
Crawford!

VII

A REAL DETECTIVE

ONE of the greatest detectives in the world (in his own opinion and, what was more remarkable still, in that of his wife) sat down to his evening meal. He called it supper; as they called it immediately after the stone age, when man and woman began to form habits. This supper consisted of corned-beef, cabbage and boiled potatoes. Haggerty heaped his plate, proceeded to slice the three into a coarse hash and sprinkled it liberally with salt, pepper and vinegar. He was not a talkative man at his meals, which he thoroughly enjoyed, having a constitution far more rugged than that

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of the United States, in that it was not open to promiscuous amendments. Nor was Mrs. Haggerty troubled with the vapors of the fashionable. She ate as silently and heartily as her lord and master. They finished off the meal with quarter slices of rich mince pie, washed down the whole with pints of aromatic coffee, and then smiled across the table. Their admiration for each other was mutual; it had stood the acid test of eight years of propinquity.

Haggerty was a real detective, a post-graduate in the virtues and delinquencies of humanity; the detective you and I know in every-day life; who was once a policeman on our block and who winked when we broke a window playing one-old-cat. Haggerty's salary might be called handsome, if one included the splits in frequent rewards; but as the pay of a

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man who took his life in his hands seven days in the week and fifty weeks in the year, it was less than meager.

"Milly, you've got 'em all kotowing when it comes t' corn'-beef an' cabbige. Say! I'm thinking of buying that little ol' shack up Bronx way, after all."

"No!"

"Sure thing!"

"But I don't like these mortgages, Will. If anything happened to you, where'd I be?"

"Sh! It's going t' be cash."

"And where are you going to get three thousand dollars? They won't take a cent under six for the place."

"Leave it t' me." He pulled out a thick black cigar. Had General Lee sent a box of them to General Grant, there wouldn't have been any Appomattox.

"Will, you aren't taking any of that

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graft stuff, after your promise to me six years ago?"

"Nix on th' graft, Milly. I ain't handsome but I'm honest. More 'n that, I ain't the gink they think I am down at Central."

"You're a smart man, Will."

Haggerty was worth looking at. He had a round head, a sign of combativeness. He had heavy rectangular jaws, a sign of perseverance. He had keen blue eyes, too, with room enough between to satisfy the most critical of phrenologists and physiognomists (for whom the detective had the heartiest contempt). To see things, to observe and retain impressions, it is not necessary to hold a university degree. Theory and logical deduction, as written, interested Haggerty just about as much as a missionary's lecture on the uplift of the sinful Hottentot

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would have done. Crime to him was merely a picture-puzzle; there were so many pieces and only one way to put them together. When he found a piece he laid it aside; when he found another piece he tried to fit the two together. If they did not fit, he proceeded to hunt for the other pieces. By and by he got a corner together, maybe a center-piece; in the end the picture unfolded. Nothing mysterious about this.

Haggerty was not brilliant; he was only slow and sure. And because of this ability to wait he had now been a detective of the first class for six years. As the character of his investigations somewhat removed him from the graft zone, his promise to his wife was rather a negligible one. The low cut-purse, the polished swindler, the dishonest bank-official, all were fish to his net. Being a man of

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great physical strength, courageous as all Irishmen are who have had to fight their way to a decent pay-roll, and fond of his work besides, he was formidable. He was well-known, feared and respected. He never approached his quarry till he was absolutely certain of his picture-puzzle. Then his hand fell heavily. He was just but merciless. His business was to get the criminal. If a jury wanted to let the man go, that was no concern of his.

“Some time between now an’ midnight, Milly, I’m going t’ put this handsomely manicured duke on th’ shoulder of th’ cleverest crook New York has seen in years. He’s had th’ force up a tree for almost a year. Piece of bull-headed luck, but luck’s half of any game.”

“Who is it, Will?”

“Th’ gentlemanly jewel-thief, as th’ reporters call him.”

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"Seven thousand dollars in rewards!"

"Six from th' people who've been jobbed an' one from Pa Knickerbocker. That'll take care care of that little ol' Bronx shack, an' some onion money besides. Oh, I've got him all right. Queer case, though; an' I don't understand it all yet. But I know who an' where he is."

"Tell me. You've never said a word." His wife leaned across the table eagerly.

"I don't talk till I'm sure, Milly. If you women'd only think it out that way there'd be a lot o' trouble saved. Well, you remember I used t' pooh-hooh this finger-print business. Looked like expert stuff. I never saw two experts who agreed on anything. But this thumb-print is th' real article; you can't get away from it. Fact. When Mrs. Armitage lost her emeralds—forty thousand iron-boys, including duty—think of it, forty thou-

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sand for a string of little Irish-green stones—well, I was detailed t' look over th' case. She has a whatchacallit next t' her bedroom."

"Boudoir."

"That's it. Well, she had th' slickest wall-safe you ever heard of. Ordinary furnace-register in th' wall an' back of it the safe. New stunt. But there's always somebody that finds out. Little table stands in front of it. Maid hadn't dusted it lately. Saw a nice thumb-print. Perfect. Got it photographed, an' went over th' help an' th' folks themselves. Didn't match. Same print on a little idol in the safe. So I put it away for future reference. There wasn't any match for it down at Central, either. New hand. Th' idol was one o' them Hindu things. Chap was interested in it. We laid low for th' break-up of th' jewels. Never came. Say!

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mebbe we didn't sit up an' take notice." Haggerty fumbled in his waistcoat for a match.

"Every good jewel is registered. All jewelers know something about it. Well, nothing doing in Rotterdam or Amsterdam, or any other of th' ol' country dams. Th' guy was either afraid or waiting till we forgot. But we don't forget, Milly. Then came th' Hollister pink pearls. Ol'-fashioned safe this trip. Easy job. Ol' Hollister had one o' those jade plates. Whata you think? Same thumb-print on that. Number three, th' Morris rubies. Good safe, nice job, but no visiting card of any one we knew. A Looy th' Fourteenth minachure. Morris says it's worth two thousand. Mr. Thumb-print again. I was getting loony. Suddenly it got int' my coco that th' gink was interested in curios. Get me?"

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Mrs. Haggerty squeezed her hands together in her excitement.

“Nothing more after th’ Morris rubies. That was eight months ago. Well, I went bug on th’ thumb-print thing. Hunted bar-rails, ship-rails; everywhere you could think of. Y’ see, there was a little scar across what th’ wise ones call the whorl. That was his photograph. Th’ swag mounted up to a hundred an’ twenty thousand, market value. Now, that’s going some even these days, when you think of it. For weeks an’ weeks nothing but blind alleys. Then came th’ bull-headed luck. They were putting in some new mummies at th’ museum, an’ I was detailed t’ watch th’ crowd for dips. I was looking over one o’ th’ new cases, when who bobs up but Mr. Thumb-print, ’s large as life. You could have knocked me over with a feather. Say, girl, you

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wouldn't think it, but there's three thousand bugs in this little ol' New York who don't do nothing but collect things, furniture, rugs, china, weapons, foreign things an' mummies. Say, but I wore out some shoe-leather. All th' time I was handling th' reg'lar jobs. I hobnobbed with students an' professors. I gum-shoed th' homes of th' noted archy—what's them?"

"Archeologists," supplemented Mrs. Haggerty, who had gone through high-school.

"By an' by I got rid of two thousand nine hundred an' ninety-nine of the bugs. An' Number Three Thousand had me swallowing my Adam's apple. I couldn't connect *him*. A millionaire, Milly; spends thousands digging up th' dried ones, friend of th' Metropolitan directors an' J. P.; got a raft of medals, an' all that.

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'S fine a looking chap as you'd want t' see. You know, Milly, I've got what they call th' hunch. I can spot a bad actor just as you can a woman that ain't straight. That hunch balked. If he'd done it, it was as a joke, for he doesn't need money."

"Have you got his thumb-print?" asked Mrs. Haggerty, who was thinking of the seven thousand dollars.

"There's where I fell down. I couldn't get it without going at him straight. So I settled down t' study him an' his habits. One day, while I was nosing round I fell ont' something that got my goat. You see, Milly, these bugs generally play two games, one for work an' one for play. Well, this chap's play was—" Haggerty arose.

"Will!"

"Buying up ol' safes an' yegging 'em!"

VIII

MUMMIES

HAGGERTY kissed his wife and went his way. His journey's end was a brick house, three stories in height, in a quiet side street. He rang the bell and waited. No one answered. Five minutes passed, then Haggerty went across the street and began to patrol the block. He smoked incessantly and thought deeply, for he was worried. He was sure that yonder lived his man, but he had never known a case like this. The picture-puzzle had been so wonderfully cut and so abnormally interesting that he had let too much time go by. There was a fine chance of the whole thing being

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knocked out of his hands. He had waited because it might possibly be a joke; he had waited for the man to return the jewels, and he hadn't done it. He must get that thumb-print to-night or to-morrow morning at dawn on the boat.

He reviewed the facts of the case methodically, with his eyes directed toward the sharp clear stars of this October night. The man had thousands in the banks, unlimited credit, was without kith or kin; was rarely seen in the restaurants over on Broadway, and never with a woman. His cook and valet had been with him for ten years and had accompanied him on his travels. He lived comfortably, not luxuriously. He was a fine chess player and was lucky at bridge and poker, but never gambled in stocks or public places. He was thirty-nine years old, in good health. What would draw a man toward playing

MUMMIES

at safe-breaking if not a latent criminal instinct? On the other hand, this pastime was known to several of his banker friends, who sometimes made wagers with him. Well, well; his right or left thumb would presently settle the whole matter, one way or the other.

A taxicab came chugging into the street, stopped for a moment before the brick house, and went on. Haggerty jotted down the license number as he trotted across. He reached the top step just as the man with the bundle under his arm opened the door.

“Wait a moment,” said Haggerty.

The man turned.

“Are you Mr. Crawford?”—for it was too dark for Haggerty to distinguish the man’s features.

“No, sir. Mr. Crawford is out for the evening.”

DEUCES WILD

"When will he be back?"

"I can't say, sir. Possibly at midnight; probably later."

"Does he go aboard the *Celtic* to-night or to-morrow at dawn?"

The man with the bundle under his arm withdrew the night-key and calmly thrust the key-ring into his pocket. He shifted the bundle slightly.

"Is your business important?" The voice was well modulated, but it possessed a crispness which spoke of impatience.

"Rather important."

"Sorry you will not be able to see him to-night, sir."

"I'm in no hurry. I'll wait till he comes. I take it you're his valet."

"Yes, sir; Mr. Mason. But I doubt I can let you in under the circumstances. If you will designate a place I will telephone you the moment he arrives."

MUMMIES

"That's reasonable enough ; but I'm going inside to wait."

"Why, sir . . . !"

"I'm a detective, Mr. Mason ; an' your naster an' I have a little matter to discuss."

"Impossible!"

"An' he wouldn't be pleased at all if he knew I'd been here an' had t' go away."

"Oh! He expects you?"

"Yes." Which was truthful enough, since all criminals expect the law sooner or later.

"Your credentials?"

"This." Haggerty exhibited his badge.

"That's not sufficient, sir."

"All right," replied Haggerty grimly. "Suppose we both go over to th' precinct an' have 'em identify me there? They know me."

"I suppose I'll have to let you in, sir ;

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but it's all very queer and unusual. Follow me."

The valet turned on the single light in the hall. He immediately began to mount the stairs to the first floor, Haggerty at his heels. The valet stumbled, and the bundle slipped from his arm. The wrapping paper broke and disclosed half a dozen pairs of old shoes. Haggerty picked up two pairs and the valet gathered up the others. He gravely led the detective into a large room. Haggerty grasped his revolver, then let go of it, grunting inaudibly. What he saw in the dim firelight were not living people, only the shells: rows of mummies and mummy-cases called cartonnages.

"Better not turn on the lights," said Haggerty. "Th' fire's enough. These things give a fellow th' chills."

The valet deposited the shoes along the

MUMMIES

wall and Haggerty placed his beside them. Next, the valet crossed to the wood-box and threw on a log. A blaze started up.

"Sit down, sir. This is Mr. Crawford's study." Haggerty was quite familiar with it, but only in the daytime. "You'll excuse me, sir, till I pack the shoes. You see, Mr. Crawford tramps about a good deal and likes old shoes because they are most comfortable. We leave for Naples. There have been some new excavations at Herculaneum which Mr. Crawford is anxious to see."

"You can pack th' shoes when your master returns," replied Haggerty. The valet, whether he knew anything or not, would be perfectly justified in warning his master of his, Haggerty's, presence. Then genially, to cover the menace of his words, he added: "These ol' geezers might walk out on me if I was left alone with them."

DEUCES WILD

Mason shrugged. He turned on the low desk-lamp and began to arrange the books and papers on the broad flat desk. Some he put away in drawers which he locked. He then put out the light and took the easy chair by the fire, his back in half-view. Here Haggerty recognized the gentleman's gentleman, the servant who held himself detached from all affairs that did not concern his master personally, and who considered it ill-bred to converse with strangers of Haggerty's caliber. It was a lean serious face; the hand which propped his chin was long and slender.

It was half after eleven by Haggerty's watch. An hour, probably, to wait. There they were, four of them, and the one with the door hanging loosely a new one; four safes of various makes and sizes. What *was* the game?

"May I ask what it is you wish to see

MUMMIES

Mr. Crawford about?" asked the valet, after a long pause.

Ha! thought Haggerty; he *was* human after all. "Oh, he's going t' give me something for my collection." Haggerty chuckled. "But what's all these safes for?"

"A hobby of Mr. Crawford's when he's not at work on his brochures."

"His what?"

"His little books on new discoveries in archeology."

"Ah! What's he do with them?"

"Sends them to the various universities and societies."

"No, no; I mean th' safes."

"He opens them. Do you know anything about the French Revolution?"

"I've heard about it," answered Haggerty cautiously.

"Well, when Louis XVI wasn't tinker-

DEUCES WILD

ing with the revolution, he was tinkering with locks and clocks. It amused him; took his mind off his cares and troubles. Mr. Crawford finds like amusement in buying up old safes and opening them; cracking them, I believe, is the vernacular. He is remarkably clever at it."

"Well, whata you know about that!"

"Beg pardon?"

"I mean, that kind of amusement beats me. Buys safes an' cracks 'em for th' fun of th' thing! Well, I never!"

Haggerty slipped a cigar between his teeth and began to chew it.

"Smoke if you wish."

"No, thanks."

Everything open and above board; no mystery, no secrecy. A joke, it could not be anything else but a joke, a wager. But why all these months of waiting to spring it? Haggerty's troubled gaze went round

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the room, touched the valet's face again, and finally paused at the shoes. Twelve of them, broad-toed, comfortable, newly-soled and heeled. They looked very funny to Haggerty, marshaled as they were alongside a mummy perhaps three thousand years old.

"Funny idea."

"What is, sir?"

"Toting round ol' shoes like that."

IX

MONEY

“**I** NEVER saw you play such poor poker in all my life!” cried Jillson, as Forbes asked for his fifth hundred. “A ten-dollar limit, with deuces wild, and you open on two pair!”

“I keep forgetting,” replied Forbes, scowling. “You’ll never get me into one of these dashed deuces wild again.”

“You always say that,” retorted Jillson.

“Well, I mean it this time. Besides, you fellows begin with two-call-four, and you swear it won’t go any higher; and yet you boost ’er on the first straight-flush. And here’s Crawffy holding five of a kind—five of a kind, gentlemen!—four times in the last half-hour.”

MONEY

"What's on your mind, Mort?" asked Crawford. "You play a good hand, but you're off in judgment to-night."

"It's my damned artistic temperament." Forbes smiled lamely. "Two cards, please."

Only five minutes to play; only five minutes. He wanted to be alone, to think it over, to make some plan. Old Crawffy! It simply wasn't possible. Yet, there was that unforgettable cut across the knuckles. To warn him without alarming him. Old Crawffy, the lovablest man alive. . . . a crook!

"What? Oh, you start 'er, Carlyle? Well, just for a change I'll boost her another blue one."

"Call."

"Four aces!" cried Forbes triumphantly. "And what do I get for 'em? The ante and one lonesome bet. My luck!"

DEUCES WILD

"Twelve o'clock, boys." Jillson threw the decks to the floor. "Cash in. Chips for money, money for chips,"—droning the call of the professional gambler. He produced a tab and pencil and jotted down the losses and the winnings, taking particular care that these tallied with the advances from the bank. "Crawford, you old smooth guy, you win nine hundred and four dollars. I win ninety-six; just enough to pay for the whisky and tobacco and grub. I never yet heard of a host coming out on top of the game. It wouldn't look well."

The five losers got out their check-books and made preparations to settle. Crawford's face seemed to grow old and care-worn.

"Jill," he said, "got any cash? I'm sailing for Italy in the morning and won't have time to bother with checks."

Sailing for Italy! Forbes tore up three



The losers made preparations to settle

MONEY

blanks before he succeeded in getting one filled out properly. Italy. Here was a solution to the whole dark business. He would write a letter to Crawford in Naples, telling him what he knew, and that he must return the jewels at once. They would never be traceable if sent by foreign parcels-post. Armitage and Hollister and Morris might have to pay duty again, but he doubted if they would make any trouble over that as long as they received the jewels intact. And all that comedy at safe-opening had been a mask; behind it had lain tragedy. The evidence of his own eyes; nothing else could have made him believe it.

He heard Jillson saying: "I believe I can fix you out." He saw his host go to his safe and return with seven hundred. "You always carry a roll, Wheedon. Let me have two hundred and I'll give you my check for it."

DEUCES WILD

The matter was arranged, and Crawford put away the money. It hit Forbes like a blow between the eyes: Crawford asking for cash! A man whose income couldn't be the short side of two hundred thousand a year!

"Going along, Mort? Got my electric outside, and it won't be any trouble to drop you at the studio." Crawford put his arm across the younger man's shoulders.

"Thanks. Glad to go with you." To get the owner of that arm out of the reach of the police was all Forbes cared about. Once in the cab he said: "Crawffy, are you pinched for money?"

"Pinched for money?" The cab skidded, caught itself and went on. "Good Lord, no! What put that into your head? . . . Oh, I say, are *you* in need of a few hundreds? If this nine hundred . . ."

MONEY

"No, I'm on easy street. But I never saw you take cash before. You're always saying something about sending the check when a chap's ready."

"I am going away, Mort, perhaps for a long, long time; perhaps ten years; perhaps I shan't come back. Who knows?"

"Is it a woman?"

Crawford laughed. "You're always seeing petticoats. No, Mort, not a woman, only a snow-image. Why can't you pack up and come along with me? Naples will be beautiful now."

"Too many contracts. I haven't any income like you. I earn lots of money, but I have to keep on earning it. And just now I'm in a hole for a new model. By the way, do you know the Mearsons who live below Jillson?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'd give a thousand for a chance

DEUCES WILD

to draw her face, to have her pose for me." What had Crawford's sensation been when *he* entered that room?

"Sorry I can't help you."

"Why not?"

"The truth is, we are not on speaking terms."

"Oh, well, I dare say Jillson might speak a word for me."

"Good luck." Then suddenly: "What have you got to do for half an hour?"

"Nothing."

"Will you come with me while I do a trifling errand?" The bitterness of his tone did not escape Forbes.

"Surely." Forbes saw the fifteen thousand in bills at the girl's feet, her dull misery over the loss of the box. Had Crawford believed her jewels to be in it? Oh, it was damnable!

MONEY

They arrived presently before an apartment-building.

"We get out here," said Crawford, shutting off the power. "Mort, every man has a curtain which he does not lift even to his best friend. To-night I'm going to lift a corner for you. It is because I want some one with me. I am in no mood for sentiment. Come."

Forbes followed him. What was going to happen now?

X

THE OTHER HOUSE

SO MANY strange things had happened that night to Forbes that he was no longer able to sense the tingle known as excitement. He was conscious of a blunted wonder, like that of a man on a stricken ship. He followed Crawford into the hall and up the first flight.

"She's probably asleep," said Crawford; "but no matter. I ought not to bother at all." He pressed the bell-button. "Duty. It reads well, Mort, but is there anything else than bitterness in it? Duty, moral obligation. Whoever said duty was a pleasure to perform was hunting for what writers call lines."

Moral obligations. A woman probably

THE OTHER HOUSE

asleep. Forbes waited, bending his cane back and forth, like a fencer testing his steel. Duty was bitter. What about *his*?

By and by a voice said sleepily: "Who is it?"

"Crawford. Let me in."

"Just a moment."

Another wait. She was probably putting on her kimono, doubtless the prettiest one. But for the door-boy!

"What's that?" whispered Crawford.

"I didn't speak."

"I thought I heard you say something."

The door swung in. Forbes beheld a young woman, pretty once upon a time. Crawford pushed him in.

"A friend of mine, Netty; Mr. Forbes."

She repeated the name vaguely. It was quite evident that she was half asleep.

"I am going away on one of my long trips in the morning. I didn't have time to

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see you to-day. Made up my mind late. Now, Mr. Thane at the bank has been instructed to give you two hundred a month. I have turned over enough bonds to carry you along indefinitely. Don't write. You know how I hate letters. I am tired, worn-out, unhappy."

"You're a fool, Jim Crawford."

"I know it, Netty."

"A loyal, honorable, kindly fool; and only God and I know how good you are."

He made a gesture of protest.

"I went to her again last week. She refused to see me."

"You dared go to her after I had forbidden you?"—angrily.

"I don't care. She's a silly fool."

"Good-by, Netty. If I stay and talk I shall lose my temper. Good-by."

She tried to kiss his hand, but he withdrew it savagely.



"You're a fool, Jim Crawford"

THE OTHER HOUSE

"Do you hate me, Jim?"

"No, Netty, of course not. Take care of yourself; travel a little; don't stick here time without end. It'll drive you mad some day. Good-by. Come, Forbes."

The tableau always remained vivid in Forbes' mind: the young woman, her disordered hair, the white throat, Crawford's haggard eyes.

Once more in the cab, he found speech. "In God's name, what's this, Crawford? You, with a second establishment?"

"Think so? Mort, I love truth for its own sake; it's part of the pride in my blood. She is nothing to me, never has been. A bit of loyalty to the dead. My nurse's daughter, foolish and romantic. And a man I trusted. . . . Oh, well, he's dead. It was my mother's wish that I should always provide for her. I shall always do so, whether I return to America

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or not, whether I live or die. Do you believe me?"

"I'm going to try to."

"Yes, yes; I understand. It is human to look less for virtue than for transgression. All this property round here is mine. The people live close to the blinds. I do not come often; once in six months; but that once is enough for the rabbit-warren of scandalmongers. It's rather hard on that young woman; but she is made of the stuff of martyrs, and she never speaks of me, nor seeks me. Whose business is it but mine, mine? Damn all meddlers!"—with a fury which brought Forbes out of his lethargy.

"Same here!" he said. Where was the Florentine box; under the seat? And how had he done it? The iron nerve of the man, to have taken such risks! And playing poker all that time, as cool as

THE OTHER HOUSE

you please! It took a deal of control not to whirl upon Crawford and accuse him pointblank.

"Forbes, I have never wronged a soul in this world; I have never done anything I'm ashamed of. I am not even ashamed of what I did to-night. Let's not play cat and mouse any longer. You know, and I know you know. You couldn't keep your eyes off my hand. It was devilish hard on my nerves to see you walk in. What I took from Mearson's safe was . . . mine!"

"Yours!"

The cab wheeled into Broadway, out of quiet into noise. A block or two in silence.

"I sent them on a wild goose chase. To get into the apartment was simple; the safe was nothing. You know my hobby, insane as it is. I hurt my hand in getting

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through the transom. Do you care to know what was in the box? A packet of letters. One mad day I sent them back; and now one mad night I go like a thief and recover them. You will say that I should have gone to her and asked. I know her. I know myself. Pride or stubbornness, call it what you will."

"But in heaven's name, the cause?"

"We have just left it." Crawford said nothing more till the cab drew up in front of the studio. "Here you are. Good night and God bless, boy. When you get tired out with work, pack up and come over. You know where to cable. I'm a man over yonder; only a grub here."

Forbes felt himself literally pushed from the cab; and he stood on the curb, weak with shame. Damn those meddling reporters, to have put such a thought into

THE OTHER HOUSE

his head! Poor old Crawffy! The girl with the copper-beech hair. And with the thought of her came a great and glorious idea, romantic and irresistible.

Crawford turned about and proceeded swiftly down-town, toward home. Round the corner from where he lived was an ancient pawn-shop. It was open; for pawn-shops find profit in late hours. Here Crawford stopped, lifted the seat, took out the Florentine box, and went into the pawn-shop.

"Hello, Moses!" he called to the bent old man who was puttering over his accounts.

"Ha! Goot efening, Mr. Crawfort. What can I do for you dis efening?"

"Lost the key to this box and was wondering if you could open it without injuring it in any way?"

"H'm. Hant-tooled. Sure I open her."

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The old man laid on the counter a drawer full of keys, ancient, medieval, modern. At length he threw back the lid. "Putt she won't lock her again. Petter keep her open dill you fint t' key."

"Thanks. Here's a cigar for you. Good night."

"I pought dose blates you tolt me to."

"How much did you give the old lady?"

"Twenty dollars."

"Here it is. How much is the stuff worth?"

The pawnbroker laughed. "Ten cents."

"Well, never let her know." For many came to Crawford with curios to sell, and the worthy he sent to Moses who gave them what they asked and charged it.

"Somedimes I tink you are crazy, Mr. Crawford."

"Moses, I am the craziest man in all New York."

XI

A PACKET OF OLD LETTERS

HAGGERTY had chewed his cigar till it had lost its shape and most of its wrapper. He had counted the mummies and their cases, the stilted paintings on broken squares of plaster or stucco or whatever it was, and the strings of beads and scarabs hung picture-wise, under glass. Ten minutes to one. The detective was growing dangerously sleepy. He shook off the drowsiness and suggested that a fresh log be put on. It was getting too dark to be pleasant. Besides, he liked to see the valet move about as long as he made no attempt to leave the room.

DEUCES WILD

It amused Haggerty to be ignored completely, to have his existence acknowledged only when he spoke or asked a question. An out and outer of a gentleman's gentleman.

The valet put on the log and resumed his chair, staring into the crumbling embers of the old logs or seriously studying the sap-flames of the fresh as they darted toward the spark-screen.

From out of his corner Haggerty would suddenly shoot a question or an observation, just to remind the other of his presence. Invariably the valet would come out of his dreams startled.

"Has your master a private secretary?"

"No, sir. Sometimes I help him in his work."

"Ah! So you are interested in these dead ones, too?"

The valet's smile flickered. "I have

been ten years with Mr. Crawford. Naturally I take an interest in all he does."

"Uh-huh. Interested in curios, too?"

"You spoke of a collection. What kind?"

"When your master comes. But I'll tell you this much: I've a sneaking hope he ain't got what I want."

For the first time the valet became interested in the detective. "I don't quite understand you."

"Time enough for that when your master comes."

Conversation lagged again. From the wall the buttons of the six pairs of shoes twinkled like the beady eyes of rats. No matter where his glance roved, Haggerty found it always returning to the shoes. They made him laugh inwardly. A millionaire, having his shoes tapped and heeled, just like one of those thrifty old

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Wall Street sharks of another day. A swell who thought more of comfort than of style. It was all novel to Haggerty.

"You've traveled with your master?"

"Everywhere."

"You're not a Britisher?"

"No; I was born in this state."

"Any danger over there, hunting for them?"—with a gesture toward the cases.

"Sometimes. The wild Moham-medans do not always understand why we dig holes in the ground. But Mr. Crawford is quick and strong, and a dead shot."

Haggerty nodded. It was something to have learned this. With great determination he resisted the craving to smoke, for he had a purpose in not surrendering. "Now, Mr. Mason, listen t' me attentively. When your master comes, you an'

A PACKET OF OLD LETTERS

me'll slip int' that room there behind those curtains. I want t' see him come int' th' room naturally. Get me?"

"The police can not be wanting Mr. Crawford"—emphatically.

"What! a millionaire an' a philanthropist! Shoo-fly! . . . Hark! There he comes now. I have a gun in my pocket, Mr. Mason. Th' least suspicious movement on your part t' warn your master, an' I'm liable t' break your arm. Go on!"

Behind the curtains he grasped the valet's arm . . . and pursed his lips into a silent whistle. The arm was not big but it was iron-hard.

"This is a damnable outrage!" breathed the valet.

"Be still!" Haggerty jabbed the valet in the small of the back. It hurt, for the man gasped.

They heard Crawford close the doors,

DEUCES WILD

and come up in bounds, eagerly. He came into the study quickly and sought his desk upon which he laid a leather box. He contemplated it thoughtfully. Haggerty almost sighed. He had never hated duty before. A woman's jewel-box. More loot. He couldn't get head nor tail of it. Oddly, he sensed a tension in the arm of the valet. Evidently he too was surprised at what he saw. Haggerty was never going to forget this night.

Crawford threw back the lid and took out some faded flowers, a necklace of scarabs and two packets of letters, each tied neatly with blue ribbon. He crushed the smaller packet to his lips.

Having fancied himself upon firm ground, Haggerty felt like one whom a hurricane had whirled into mid-ocean. A faded bouquet and a bundle of letters! He saw seven thousand dollars take wings



He grasped the valet's arm

A PACKET OF OLD LETTERS

after the manner of butterflies he was wont to pursue when a boy. Then he saw Crawford sit down and lay his head upon his arms.

A bell rang. The arms in Haggerty's grasp jumped instinctively. Crawford rose and stood waiting. The bell rang again, violently.

"Who the devil can that be?" said Crawford aloud. His valet had two sets of keys and never rang a bell. He reached for the speaking-tube which hung at the side of the desk. "Hello! What's wanted? . . . Forbes? Why, come up!" He dropped the tube and pressed a button, an electrical contrivance that unlocked both the hall doors.

A minute passed. Haggerty gnawed his stubby mustache. Through the doorway came a young man and a beautiful girl.

DEUCES WILD

“Jim!” she cried.

Haggerty’s hand slipped from the valet’s arm which had become suddenly limp. Why?

XII

A FRIEND IN NEED

THAT which came to Forbes was an inspiration, such as comes oftenest to the kind-hearted, the impulsive and, I might add, the youthful. So he hailed the first taxicab he could find and hurried over to the Dryden. Keen-witted and observing, as full of romance as a water-chestnut is of starch, he saw that his best friend and the girl with the copper-beech hair were a pair of proud fools, spoiling their lives over a trifle. One was too proud to tell and the other too proud to listen to the truth. It was all just as silly (and human!) as one of those East Side melodramas over which

DEUCES WILD

the wise critics laughed and commented upon as humanly impossible. Just the same, he knew that these silly affairs made the melodramas of a vast host of people.

Miss Mearson was still up.

"This is Mr. Forbes."

"Forbes?"

"The gentleman who was recently tied up in that fine old Sheraton of yours."

"Oh!"

"Do you want those papers?"

"Papers?"

He thought her repetitions a trifle stupid. "Yes. I know who took them. But we'll have to hurry. Mr. Crawford sails for Italy at dawn and may go aboard to-night."

"Wait!" This was thundered through the panels of the door.

She had on her sables when she came

A FRIEND IN NEED

out, but her hair was tousled like the other woman's.

"Your father . . ." he began.

"At his club. Have you a taxicab down-stairs?"

"Yes."

"Come!" She caught him by the sleeve and dragged him to the lift. Down they went; the lift-boy's eyes opened their fullest. She never let go of the sleeve till she was inside the cab. "It was Jim, and it never came to me! How quickly can we get there?"

"In about a quarter of an hour." He directed the chauffeur, and they rumbled off.

"Did he tell you he was going to Italy?"

"Yes. He was up-stairs with us, playing poker. He doesn't intend to come back."

DEUCES WILD

"Did he send you?"

"Send me! He'll probably never speak to me again. No; there was a misunderstanding. . . ."

"I don't want any explanations, please!" she interrupted. "Not a word about that other woman. What do I care who or what she is, now? Oh, fool! Pardon! You're a good man, Mr. Forbes, to come and tell me. I shouldn't have known. . . . Going away for good and never coming back because my love wasn't worth a copper penny! It isn't even now!"

"Perhaps Jim was a fool, too," said Forbes grimly. He hadn't bargained for hysterics.

"He never was a fool; it was I."

Said Forbes: "I love him better than any man I know, and I want to help him straighten out the tangle; but if you go



She dragged him to the lift

A FRIEND IN NEED

to him in this state, you'll spoil everything. You'll be crying and he won't be able . . ."

"How can I be calm? It was my letters. He remembered I kept them in that box. He wanted to take away something that belonged to me. I am worse than an infidel; I have been making an idol of propriety. I've lied to myself for five years. If he goes to Italy in the morning, I shall go with him."

Forbes took off his hat and wiped his forehead.

"Oh, I know my heart now!"

"Will you be quiet, Miss Mearson? The chauffeur keeps turning round, and he'll run into something; then we'll never get there."

"Forgive me!"

From time to time the light from a street-lamp touched her hair, and the

DEUCES WILD

glory of it filled him with envy and sadness and he knew not what else. No woman like this one would ever run out into the night after him. It was always the quiet chap like Crawford who awakened and held such a woman. He knew something about the species; they were all more or less mad; they did the wildest things without reason, on the spur of the moment. The reverse of man, they wanted recklessly to give up everything. . . . for nothing; a kind of get-poor-quick scheme which profited no one, not even the man to whom these priceless gifts were offered. Of foresight, of calculation, they had none . . . till after they had given everything away. Forbes looked out of his side of the cab, lonely, very much depressed, hating his flirtations, his triflings, and wondering if there would ever be a woman for him. Of course

A FRIEND IN NEED

there were lots of girls. . . . How the deuce would he ever get her back to the Dryden in case Crawford was obdurate? Here it was again: these quiet chaps who never say anything and who never give in.

"You must think I am mad," came lowly from her corner.

Bad sign, thought Forbes. She was beginning to think it over.

"I *am* mad."

No, she wasn't thinking it over.

"I shall always be mad like this. But what must you think of me!"

"I'm thinking a whole lot. I don't know but what you call madness is sudden sanity. Jim may be glad to see me, and then he may not be. You'll have to intercede for me."

"Don't worry about your part, Mr. Forbes. No man could do a kinder thing

DEUCES WILD

than you have done. Why, you don't even know me! But you'll not regret it."

"No? How do you know I shan't regret it?"—lightly. "When I've watched you day by day as you went past my studio, and wondered how I should meet you, wondered if the day would ever come when I'd say the same words Crawford said five years ago!"

"Don't laugh, Mr. Forbes."

"Laugh? The Lord knows I'm serious enough. But here we are. Get yourself in hand. I want to make this a happy-ever-after story, and tell it to a friend of mine who'll make thousands of silly schoolgirls shudder with rapture."

"You're a strange man."

"No, only I'm a little mad myself to-night."

The girl was at the top of the steps, hunting for the bell, ere Forbes could

A FRIEND IN NEED

complete his directions to the chauffeur, who nodded boredly and took out a cigarette. These night-adventures were as old as the hills to him.

XIII

A LOVE STORY

TABLEAU. The rosy light from the fire touching the gold-leaf on a royal cartonnage, or moving the shadows on the wall behind, ruddying a face three thousand years old, twinkling back from the shoe-buttons. So much for the inanimate. Crawford, erect, proud and defiant; the girl poised on the threshold, with the winged eagerness of Victory; Forbes, twirling his hat, diffident and abashed. All these things Haggerty saw from behind his curtain.

In life as in fairy-tales, 'tis woman who breaks the enchantment. The picture dissolved as she ran toward Crawford, whose glance went past her to Forbes.

A LOVE STORY

"My letters!"

"They are mine!"

"And I?"

Crawford did not understand. "Forbes, did you tell her? If you did, God forgive you, I never will!"

Forbes flung his hat on a chair. "All I've done is to bring her to you."

"He came and told me you were sailing and never coming back. I've been a miserable fool!" She held out her arms, round and firm and white. To Forbes she was as lovely as the Madonna he had once dreamed of painting. "I don't care who the other woman is. Whatever she has been to you. . . ."

"Janet, you are hysterical!"

"No. Do you want me, Jim?"

Crawford leaned with his hands upon the desk. He was as white as she was. Forbes turned his back and began idly to

DEUCES WILD

pluck at the frayed brittle wrapping of a mummy. Lord! he thought, even this gruesome thing had loved something once.

"Janet," he heard Crawford say, "will you go with me to Italy in the morning?"

"Yes."

"Without question, past or future?"

"As I am." The fever was gone from her voice.

"You will give up the life you have known and share the hardships of mine?—For they are hard and as much a part of me as the air."

"Yes, as I am, now."

The mummy at which Forbes was staring strangely wavered. Forbes blinked hard and caught the tears before they fell. It wasn't Crawford's story he was thinking of it; it was his own, his own idle, drifting, innocuous story. His head stole



The girl was poised on the threshold

A LOVE STORY

round in spite of his effort to keep it from doing so. There they stood, face to face, tense. The girl's sables had fallen apart, disclosing her peignoir. She had come out like that! Why the devil didn't the man take her, take her? His heart swelled with rage. But the rage died as quickly as it had come. Crawford swung the girl into his arms; all the weariness gone from his scholarly face, which was now transfigured with something Forbes had never seen on any man's face before.

"Girl," said Crawford, "I'm a brute, but I wanted to be sure. Five years! Well, this moment is worth it."

"Tell her the truth," cried Forbes hoarsely.

"Why should I? In her heart of hearts she knows it, knows that there never was and never will be another

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woman. Oh, Mort!"—with a hand outstretched over the girl's shoulders—"when I saw you come in I could have cursed you, for I believed you must have told her; and I wanted no other love than this, absolute, without reservation. I am an odd man, but I am as God made me. You wonder why I did not explain long ago. She accused me of bringing her a second-hand love. I deny that I evinced foolish pride when I left her. She had listened to idle gossip without first hearing my side before she judged. Had she come to me at any time as she has come to-night. . . . What's the use of going over all that? She is mine now, even if you did bring her to me."

"On the contrary," said Forbes, "I believe she brought *me*."

The girl's arm wound about Crawford's neck, tightly.

A LOVE STORY

"What's the matter?" asked Crawford suddenly, as he marked the expression of astonishment on his friend's face.

The answer came from behind. "Sorry, sir, t' interrupt," said Haggerty, pushing the valet before him; "but duty's duty, an' time don't wait."

For Haggerty, familiar as he was with battle, murder and sudden death, had never witnessed a scene like this one, and it had outlasted his patience.

"And who the devil are you?" demanded Crawford, swinging about and facing the detective.

The girl stepped back, her fingers trembling with the collar of her cloak. Immediately she dropped her hands, smiled and laid one hand on Crawford's arm confidently. What did all the other people in the world matter?

"I am Haggerty, of th' Central Office."

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Haggerty knew when to bluster and when not to.

"What are you doing here in my house?"

Forbes was beset by all his previous doubts. A detective, and why should he be here? He thought of a thousand ways of overcoming Haggerty, of holding him till Crawford was safely aboard the *Celtic*; and then remembered the surest and deadliest of all detectives—the wireless. There was no escape.

"He would not inform me, sir," spoke the valet, drawing down his cuffs.

"Was he threatening you, Mason?"

"Oh, no, sir. He merely desired you to enter without suspecting his presence. I don't understand him at all, sir."

"Well, Mr. Haggerty?" said Crawford.

"You are James Crawford," began Haggerty, walking over to the desk.

A LOVE STORY

"I am."

"A rich man with a fad for digging up these things"—indicating the walls.

"Yes."

"All right; have a little patience till I get th' shell off an' down t' th' meat."

"I'm waiting."

"This morning you got tickets in a hurry for yourself an' valet for Italy. Then you did th' rounds of your banks. You had lunch at your club with an ol' gent with whiskers who's just back from Upper Egypt. You worked most o' th' afternoon here in this room. Listen. On Tuesday night, th' second week in June last, you played poker till six in th' morning in th' studio of that young chap over there"—with a jerk of his head toward Forbes. "You won three hundred dollars. Coming home that morning you gave ten dollars t' th' ol' apple-woman on

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the corner near th' pawn-shop. There's a flat not far away, with a young woman living in it. No harm done in telling that since th' young lady here knows all about it. I could 'a' told her you was straight an' decent an' that th' young woman was living on your charity."

"What, in God's name, is all this about?" gasped Crawford.

Mason the valet went to the side window and threw it up. He remained standing by it, unnoticed.

XIV

OLD SHOES

“I’M telling you all these facts,” continued Haggerty, “so you won’t waste any time getting down t’ cases. Every move you’ve made for th’ last six months is jotted down in a little book in my pocket. All I want,” he added, taking out a small India-ink pad and a square of white paper, “all I want is an impression of your thumbs. After that, why, we can talk. Do you object?”

“Not in the least,” said Crawford readily. “I’m very anxious to know what all this damned nonsense means.”

He angrily dabbed both thumbs upon the pad and printed them upon the square of paper. Through a glass Haggerty

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very carefully compared the impression with the treasured photograph. His brows bent. All this work for nothing. Haggerty was bitterly disappointed. The thumb-prints were identical in none of the essential details. And yet the trail ended in this house. . . .

"Mason!" exclaimed Crawford.

Haggerty dashed to the window, out of it and down the fire-escape. He had the Irishman's inborn courage and pride of strength. He never used powder when he could use his hands. Only the murderer, fleeing, knew the deadly accuracy of his aim. Then he was better dead than alive; out of reach of the bullyragging attorneys, doddering insanity experts, tender judges and purblind juries. Haggerty wanted Mr. Mason alive. It was a matter of pride, aside from the seven thousand dollars in rewards.

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Crawford, Forbes and the girl pressed about the window; but all they saw was Haggerty, vanishing out of the alley-way. They waited, tense with excitement. Only Forbes knew what it was about, but it never occurred to him to explain.

Pistol-shots. It was only an official warning for policemen in the vicinity to be on the lookout for a running man, any one who looked suspicious.

The trio remained by the window for a full quarter of an hour, without exchanging a word, scarcely moving. Presently they saw Haggerty enter the alley-way. He climbed the fire-escape and stepped into the room. He wore a saturnine expression.

"Well, he slipped me; but that's nothing. He'll never get out of th' city. But I'm an ornament t' th' office. For six months I've been so interested in watch-

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ing you that I never gave anybody else a thought."

"What has he done?" cried Crawford. "Why, the man has been with me for ten years, constantly, faithful as a dog. Twice in Mesopotamia he saved my life. What the deuce will I do without him?"

"He's th' man who stole th' Armitage emeralds, th' Hollister pearls, an' th' Morris rubies."

Crawford made a despairing gesture. It was so incomprehensible. "What proof have you?"

Haggerty dryly indicated the window. "He saw what was coming. He knew that if I wasn't satisfied with your thumb-prints, I might think of his."

"Good God!" Crawford struck his forehead. "And I am the cause of it!"

"Huh?" said Haggerty startled.

Crawford pointed toward the safes.

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Haggerty nodded appreciatively, ran his glance over the safes, and nodded again. "If a man could only see two ways at once!" he mourned, half humorously, half seriously.

"He was mad!"

"Mebbe. But listen here. At th' Armitage case there was a thumb-print on an idol; at th' Hollister's, on a piecē o' jade; at th' Morris's, on a minachure. You gave a mummy t' th' museum. On th' head-piece I accidentally discovered th' same print. Th' guy that did all this fine work was fond o' queer things. Th' thumb-print on th' mummy-case wiped out everybody but you. An' when I learned th' way you yegged safes for th' fun o' th' thing, why, I thought all I had t' do was t' put th' darbies on you an' motor to klink. But th' rest of you didn't fit in, somehow. You had me guessing. Why,

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I found out that your banker has a pay-roll of three thousand a month that you give away t' th' poor. All this mystery about detectives is bosh. There ain't any mystery; it's only addition an' subtraction. Well, I couldn't add th' theft an' th' safe-blowing an' that pay-roll, an' get th' sum I needed. I held off th' thumb-print till now, an' there's where I fall down."

"My fault! Why, I am almost as guilty as he is. He used to watch me most carefully whenever I opened a safe in sport."

"Sure, he did. An' say, take it from me, Mr. Crawford, he had a good teacher. There ain't a yegg in th' country who can do it neater than you; only it's amateurish. I mean, you didn't use any of th' stuff used by th' professionals. Say! I've a mind t' run you in an' lock you up as it is. Some o' these smooth ones'll be kidnaping you an' making you do th'

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work." Haggerty smiled, but his heart was heavy. Seven thousand gone to glory.

The girl reached secretly for Crawford's hand and pressed it. To her all this was only a prologue.

"Y' see, I figured it out this way. You'd done it on a wager as a joke, an' I was kinda waiting t' hear th' return of th' jewels. Say! can I light this cheroot?"

"Go ahead and smoke," said Forbes, taking upon himself the privileges of host.

He had never heard of a detective like this one. The Lecocqs and Vidocqs and Corentins of his library were invariably men of marvelous education, chemists, biologists, linguists, diplomats and all that, pedantically quoting from Montaigne and Rochefoucauld and Voltaire and Rousseau. He would have wagered his next ten drawings against that fat black cigar that Haggerty had never heard

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of *The Purloined Letter*. On the other hand he was real, deeply and terribly versed in the ways of humanity, not a symbolical Javert. He was a great detective, for here he was, at the end of the chase, beaten by a peculiar phase and not by stupidity. The patience, the infinite painstaking, that had brought him like a true hunting-hound into this room!

Haggerty blew out thick clouds of smoke, then sucked it in gratefully.

"All my fault," repeated Crawford. "I've made a criminal out of an honest man."

"Don't you worry about that," reassured Haggerty. "Let me tell you something. We're all criminals, only some of us go through without provocation 'r opportunity. Get me?"

The others nodded.

"Well, nobody puts his hand int' an-

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other man's jewel-box for th' sport of it—unless he's a rich man like you, Mr. Crawford, an' wants an exciting joke. Whata you know about Mason before you hired him?"

Crawford thought for a moment. "Nothing. If I recall it, he came to me without recommendations."

"Uh-huh." Haggerty turned round his cigar luxuriously. "How'd you know he wasn't off-color when you hired him?"

"Why, man, he's had a thousand chances to rob me, of big sums, too, over there. Joint letters-of-credit for thousands, and loose money besides."

"An' in a minute the whole world'd know *he* did it," observed Haggerty. "No; our man ain't that kind. Saw his chance when you fooled with th' safes. He had some patience, believe me."

"But why, why? He had twelve hun-

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dred the year and all his expenses, and no family. Where's your motive?"

"Listen here. Men an' women commit murder an' robbery for two things, nothing else; for love an' stakes t' gamble with. Think it over. It all comes down t' that. There ain't anything else. Love an' a stack o' chips. I ain't one o' those philosophical guys, Mr. Crawford; I'm talking from experience. I know more about actual life in one minute than these book guys with ten Carnegie libraries stacked behind 'em. You might add jealousy; but that's only love turned wrong side out. Love an' chips it is."

Gravely Crawford took out his poker winnings.

"What's that for?" asked Haggerty.

"Twenty-four hours," begged Crawford; "for I feel like a criminal myself. Twenty-four hours."

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"The poor man!" said the girl, timidly touching Haggerty's arm.

"If I took that money it wouldn't be fair t' you, sir. Twenty-four hours'll do him no good. They're hunting for him all over town now,—every railroad, every boat, ferry, street-car, cab. From coast t' coast, north an' south too; to-morrow there won't be a town as small as your fist where they won't be looking for him. An' he's easy. No ordinary fiz. An' I have his thumb-print, th' best photo going. Th' newspapers guy us a lot, but we go right along just th' same. When a man really gets by us it's suicide or graft t' some guy higher up than yours truly. How do you know there ain't a woman back of it, or that he wasn't a secret gambler? An' now you'll have to put over your sailing an' give evidence."

"I can do that very well," replied

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Crawford, drawing the girl to him again.

"Never mind me," said Haggerty. "I've been through all that. Th' only thing that gets my goat is th' splitting up of th' rewards six ways for Sunday, unless"—with sudden alertness—"unless th' loot is hidden in th' trunks somewhere, ready t' sell t' some nigger over there who ain't particular. Hey? Keen idea. No beaten track for his."

"Let us go to work at once," said Crawford. "Are you cold?"—to the girl.

"No. I'm never going to be cold any more. Kiss me. I don't care."

Crawford looked at Haggerty, who suddenly found interest in his cigar; at Forbes, who calmly turned his back.

And as Haggerty's gaze trailed off the end of his cigar, he saw the merry winking shoe-buttons. The cigar went through the window.



He ripped off the heel neatly

OLD SHOES

"Say! do you wear ol' shoes when you go scouting round for mummies?"

"Yes."

"Did you order Mason t' have them shoes done over?"

"No, but he always has them soled and heeled when I start on a journey. . . . Good lord! do you think. . . ."

"I can soon find out!" cried Haggerty.

He seized upon a pair of shoes, hap-hazardly, and carried them to the desk. He was an old hand at this business, and he ripped off the heel neatly. From the hollow within a dozen beautiful pink pearls rolled and danced upon the desk. With cries Crawford and Forbes and the girl put out their hands to prevent the orients from scattering to the floor.

Haggerty, who was still wearing his hat, took it off and solemnly bowed toward the open window.

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But they never found Mason. He was destined for more brilliant things than stone-breaking. I learned all these facts from Forbes the next day. You see, I'm Piffle.

THE END



R. A. G.

"What's been going on here?"

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